

TRIBAL INITIATIVES

Profile of a Native-run Community Museum

Sue Herne
The Akwesasne Museum

For over 30 years, the Akwesasne Museum has been serving the Mohawk community of Akwesasne, New York, and its visitors. The museum does so by providing a

cultural resource collecting institution, traditional arts programs, and educational programs. A Client Assistance Program grant in 1997 helped to clarify museum preservation needs. Climate controls were put into place thanks to a National Park Service Tribal Preservation Grant. The grant also made major improvements in the museum's storage. An exhibit that includes

prints from glass plate negatives was also upgraded with grant funds. A part-time collections care manager position is presently funded with the aid of the Akwesasne Economic Development Agency, a local community economic development program.

Artifact donations can exemplify the restorative efforts of a museum for individuals and the wider community. In 2003, Charles Stickney donated a beaded yoke and belt circa 1917 and Robin Lazore donated a newly designed Mohawk basket. In 2001, Paul Lussier donated a beaded, finger-

The beaded yoke was donated to the Akwesasne Museum by Charles Stickney. Photo courtesy of Sue Herne.



woven sash, approximately 250 years old, which was entrusted to the oldest son in the Lussier family for the last three generations. Concerned his family had lost connection to its Mohawk roots, Lussier felt that the best way to care for the sash was to return it to a Mohawk community. Once Lussier's heritage was verified and the sash was examined by the Mohawk Council, the Lussier family traveled to Akwesasne to present the belt to the community saying, "It has returned home where it belongs."

Traditional arts help to reinforce

cultural values and pride. The museum hosts traditional arts classes with funding from the New York State Council on the Arts. The classes help to pass skills on to the next generation of Mohawk artisans. Akwesasne is best known for black ash splint and sweetgrass basketry. Classes focus on basketry, including a summer program for children, but other arts are featured as well. Beadwork and corn-husk doll-making have become regular offerings and a new youth class uses traditional song and dance in portraying legends.

Another source of educational

materials available through the museum is a set of kits that includes a variety of books, videos, and objects. Intended for individuals of all ages, the kits are a valuable cultural resource for any organization wishing to promote greater understanding of Native communities. By taking a closer look at one Native community—Akwesasne—students of any age will be prompted to relearn old truths and discard old misconceptions.

For more information and a free sample activity in both age groups, visit the website at <http://www.akwesasneculture.org>.

Native American Tribes with Officially Recognized Tribal Historic Preservation Offices

September 30, 2003.

Caddo Tribe of Oklahoma (Oklahoma)
 Catawba Indian Nation (South Carolina)
 Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe (South Dakota)
 Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Reservation (Montana)
 Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation (Montana)
 Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (Washington)
 Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation (Oregon)
 Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon (Oregon)
 Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (North Carolina)
 Hualapai Tribe (Arizona)
 Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin (Wisconsin)
 Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians (Wisconsin)
 Leech Lake Band of Chippewa Indians (Minnesota)
 Makah Tribe (Washington)
 Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin (Wisconsin)
 Mescalero Apache Tribe (New Mexico)
 Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Indians (Minnesota)

Narragansett Indian Tribe (Rhode Island)
 Navajo Nation (Arizona)
 Northern Cheyenne Tribe (Montana)
 Onieda Nation of Wisconsin (Wisconsin)
 Passamaquoddy Tribe (Maine)
 Poarch Band of Creek Indians (Alabama)
 Pueblo of Zuni (New Mexico)
 Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewas (Wisconsin)
 Seneca Nation of Indians (New York)
 Skokomish Indian Tribe (Washington)
 Spokane Tribe of Indians (Washington)
 Squaxin Island Tribe (Washington)
 Standing Rock Sioux Tribe (North Dakota)
 Table Bluff Reservation-Wiyot Tribe (California)
 Timbisha Shoshone Tribe (California)
 Tunica-Biloxi Indians of Louisiana (Louisiana)
 Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa (North Dakota)
 Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah, Massachusetts)
 White Mountain Apache Tribe (Arizona)
 Yurok Tribe (California)

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